

# A Battle with Condors High Up Among the Snow-Clad Peaks.

## FIRST MAN ON THE PINNACLE OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT.

### Zurbriggen's Thrilling Journey to the Highest Peak in America, 23,910 Feet Above the Pacific Ocean.

#### Scaling the Summit of Mount Aconcagua, in Chili, Where the Foot of Man Never Before Has Trod.

Panama, Jan. 27.—Full particulars have just been received from Valparaiso of the ascent of Mount Aconcagua by Zurbriggen, the Swiss, who came as a guide to Mountaineer Fitzgerald in his attempt to scale the highest peak in the Western world.

Zurbriggen, it now appears, went ahead of his employer, who, on account of some slight indisposition, was unable to make the complete ascent with the guide.

This extraordinarily interesting expedition was watched with some jealousy by the local officials, both of the Chilean province of Aconcagua and the adjoining Argentine department of Mendoza, each side apparently suspecting that the proposed feat of mountain climbing had something to do with the boundary dispute between the two republics. The feeling over this question is still very bitter, and both Chileans and Argentines are on the alert to prevent each other from gaining any advantage.

Another difficulty in the way was the powerful superstition of the natives, most of whom are of mixed blood, and largely imbued with old Indian beliefs about the infernal mountain. One of these superstitions is that "the spirit of fire" dwells at the top and seizes any human beings that come within his reach and plunges them into a fiery lake. This is supposed by the more educated residents of the vicinity to be a distorted legend of the remote period, when Aconcagua was a living volcano, and sent a stream of fire to heaven from the loftiest crater on the globe. On account of this and other superstitions the ignorant natives hesitate to scale the great mountain, and if not should overtake any of them on its sides, they hasten to the valleys.

Another reason Aconcagua is held in dread is that the condor, the great vulture of the Andes, makes its home on the lofty crags of the mountain and has been frequently known to attack children and even men and women in the adjoining districts. The condors are more numerous in the vicinity of Aconcagua than in any other part of South America, and while they chiefly feed on carrion, they have been known, when carrion was scarce, to carry off not only sheep and calves but human beings as prey.

Only three months ago the child of a herdsman living near the foot of the mountain was borne away by a condor in full view of the assembled peasants. This powerful and ferocious bird has also been known to attack lonely travellers.

It is said to have been a custom of a tribe of Indians who in the old pagan times dwelt near the slopes of Aconcagua, to dispose of the old men of the tribe by taking them part way up the mountain and leaving them there to die. A former explorer was reported to have discovered a spot about a mile up the mountain-side where a number of human skeletons marked the last resting place of the aged Indians thus left in their fate.

In view of these facts it is not strange that Aconcagua has been avoided by the natives, whose services are almost indispensable to any traveller in that region.

Efforts were made to deter Fitzgerald from his undertaking, but the more he saw of the mountain the more determined he was to succeed. There are lofty peaks all about it, but Aconcagua stands the dominant figure of the landscape, its somewhat depressed cap looking like a crown amid the pointed mountain tops which pierce the sky below.

Notwithstanding the fact that the grandeur of the mountain is somewhat diminished by the general elevation of that region above the sea, it is still the colossus of the continent, with its summit visible from the Chilean coast and overlooking the Argentine Republic far toward the Atlantic. The summit seemed to float in the sky, and Fitzgerald said he could easily understand why the natives regarded it as something apart from the world.

The explorers procured donkeys as well as natives at San Felipe, and had much more confidence in the former than

in the latter, for the donkeys could be trusted to find a footing where there was any, while the bipeds were expected to ascend at the first sign of trouble. The procession started on the steep slopes, Fitzgerald and Zurbriggen on donkeys, although the Swiss guide had at first objected to what seemed to him an undignified method of climbing.

The donkeys showed wonderful sagacity, and picked their way along the crags and up the slopes as steadily as if they were on level ground, and Zurbriggen, who started to climb on foot, concluded to trust himself again to the donkey.

The first day passed without serious adventure, and the party camped on the mountain. The spectacle at night is described by them as one of unequalled grandeur. The sky was of Southern clearness, and the snowy crown of Aconcagua seemed to reflect back the light of the stars. The color effects were of extreme beauty, and nature revelled in scenic and chromatic display. A stream of shining down a deep gorge in the mountain side and evidently fed by the snows above added to the picturesque of the spectacle, while the chilling and raw air warned the travellers that they were approaching a climate very different from that of the fertile valleys below.

The second day's advance was more difficult than the first. In passing along a narrow ledge with a barely afforded footing for a donkey, one of the natives nearly fell over the cliff. Had he fallen he would have been dashed to pieces on the rocks many hundred feet below. The man succeeded in catching the tail of a donkey, and the sure-footed animal not only maintained its own balance, but also supported the man, who succeeded in steadying himself and regaining his foothold.

Nearly all the natives deserted during the day, firing their way back to the villages, and one of the deserters spread a report that Fitzgerald and Zurbriggen had perished by falling over a cliff. This report caused much anxiety, until it was contradicted by the safe return of the explorers.

On the third day Zurbriggen proceeded alone. The Swiss guide had hardly begun his ascent when he was met by an unexpected peril. He was attacked by condors. Zurbriggen had seen the lumbering bird of prey sometimes carried off children, but he had never known men to be attacked by one. Two of these immense vultures assailed him so furiously that he was compelled to use his alpenstock to defend himself. The condors threw themselves at him, whirling about him overhead and attacking him with their talons in their excitement. They evidently hoped to drive their first human victim from their native crags, and but for Zurbriggen's agility and courage they would have done him serious harm. He succeeded in beating them off, although for some time they



Altitude, 23,910—Deserted by the Natives, the Plucky Swiss Reached the Summit on the Third Day Almost Frozen by the Cold.

keeping warm, and the water could not be heated sufficiently to cook food.

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The last two thousand feet of the ascent were very difficult, and Zurbriggen came near losing his footing several times and slipping down the snow-clad slopes. The snow, however, was hard, and he was able to make his way over it and even up steep ascents by digging into it with his heels, and at times chopping steps to make a rude stairway.

When at last he stood on the summit he could scarcely believe that he was the first to have reached the point, as the ascent did not compare in difficulty with that of Mount Blanc. The air was so rarified that he found breathing difficult, and he did not stay long, therefore, to enjoy his triumph.

The descent was attended with more peril than the ascent. Zurbriggen found it harder to keep from slipping than when he was on his way up, and for a considerable distance he had to make sure of each step

the camp below he was almost exhausted, and, for some minutes was unable to speak.

Great excitement prevailed in Valparaiso on receipt of the news that the highest pinnacle of the Western world had at length been scaled. At the same time considerable regret was expressed that the achievement had not been performed by a Chilean, instead of by a professional mountain climber from Europe.

There is talk of fitting out a Chilean expedition to make a thorough exploration of the mountain, and the Chilean Government is expected to take an interest in the enterprise. The mountain lies within Chilean territory, and the "Yankees of South America," as they are called, are very proud of their possession of the loftiest point of land on the American continent.

Both Fitzgerald and Zurbriggen will, it is

thing, expect to meet Dr. Frederick A. Cook and Professors Cope and Helliwell somewhere in the neighborhood of the Antarctic a year or two years, or perhaps three years, from now, for the South Polar expedition of the Berlin Geographical Society, of which I am going to head, is assuming shape, and part of the money has been secured.

If for some reason or other we do not succeed in launching the scheme just yet, I shall revisit Franz Josef Land in the summer. Mr. Harnsworth having placed his ship at my disposal that I might pay a visit to the Jackson expedition. Of course, I am more than anxious to go to the South Pole this summer or fall.

We know very little of the South Pole, but we do know that there is no land along the meridians there, while Arctic explorers hunting for the North Pole are almost sure to meet land. If North Pole hunters lose their ship, they may take to the boats or sleighs. A South Pole expedition, suffering the loss of its ship, is almost sure to perish.

The Berlin Geographical Society expects to fit out two vessels, which will travel in close proximity to each other, so that in case of wreck or other misfortune the crew of one vessel may be transferred to the other.

For the reasons given and others I consider a South Pole expedition far more dangerous than one to the northern extremity of the globe, and at the same time I think its perils fully compensated for by the promise of epoch-making discoveries.

The South Pole is the region of mystery. What we know of the distribution of land and water there amounts to very little. Meteorology, geography, geology and zoology will be immeasurably enriched by scientific observations in those parts. We must take soundings, we must operate the latest trawls to explore the greatest possible depths of the sea. That can be done now to the extent of 14,000 feet. There are a thousand and one problems to be solved. Do you know that the southern

Europe and America. We were imprisoned by ice fields near Nova Zembla and abandoned our ship, landing at unknown islands which we called Franz Joseph Land. To the north of Nova Zembla we found an open ocean in which navigation was only impeded by very light and scattered ice. I think I found the entrance of the best, if not the only, water passage to the neighborhood of the pole on that occasion.

Experience is one of the chief requisites of the traveller in polar waters, and I think I have had plenty of it aside from those just mentioned. During my several long journeys I had no less than 133 scrapes with ice bears on the ship, in the sleigh and while making observations on shore. I have noticed they are especially fond of astronomers. Two of these scientists who accompanied the German expedition—Professor Borger and Professor Koopman—I rescued from being eaten by bears. Both are alive to-day to tell the story.

Drifting promises success only under extraordinary and unusual circumstances. I would never permit an expedition headed by myself to be enclosed in ice if I could help it. By drifting an expedition may be taken to regions it wants to avoid. It may have to return without having gained any scientific result whatever.

As to the question what I expect to find at the South Pole or in its neighborhood, no definite answer can be given. Whether we will come across a land of promise, of sunshine and flowers and birds, who knows! Though I cannot bring myself to accept the story of Captain Syme's delightful Utopia that tells of gardens of Eden at the South and North poles, yet I ask if evidences of life and evolution have been found to exist in near proximity to the North Pole, why not at the South Pole?

The Scandinavian explorer, Borchgrevink, is of opinion that the islands of the North Pole are inhabited by human beings. Why should we not hope to discover a new race of man at the southern extremity of the globe?

I now proceed to answer a question put to me direct by the New York Journal, namely: Whether or not I have said at any time, or to anybody, that the South Pole is inhabited. My answer is: I have not said that there are human beings at the South Pole, but have intimated the possibility that human beings may be found there. These human beings, if they do exist, would certainly afford a most interesting study. Their development, progress and achievements would engage the curiosity of all, and would at once become the subject of investigation by scientists the world over.

The discoverer of the South Pole would be a great man, indeed, but he who finds a new race of man would be greater, and it seems to me that Americans are especially interested in such a possibility, for the Antarctic hemisphere was certainly at one time connected with South America, as well as with Australia and Africa.

JULIUS VON PAYER.  
Vienna, Jan. 13.

#### WINE IN PAPER.

A Substitute for Glass, especially for Use in the Wine Cellars of Ocean Steamships.

The biggest item of incidental loss in ocean traffic during the stormy seasons of the year is that of breakages in the wine, liquor and beer rooms. No matter how securely the bottles are fixed in the bins, a particularly heavy sea striking the ship in a certain spot or continued rolling and pitching, will cause great losses in costly fluids that were never intended to wash the floor or the walls. A French firm is going to do away with this old-time source of annoyance and complaint. After years of experimenting it has succeeded in manufacturing a paper bottle which will not break, and which has all the advantages of the ordinary glass bottle. There is little doubt that next summer's tourists will be served with beverages in paper bottles.

Altitude, 19,000—The Second Day's March Up the Steep Slopes Along the Edge of Yawning Chasms.

Another report brought back by natives who had deserted the expedition was that they had found "the place of the dead," where aged Indians had been left to perish in the olden times, and were afraid to proceed any further lest the spirits of the dead might destroy them. Another misfortune which attended the second day's ascent was the loss of a donkey load of food, which slipped from the animal's back and rolled into an abyss.

Toward night on the second day the ascent became more dangerous, the slopes more difficult to surmount, and the sheer sides of yawning chasms apparently more bottomless and terrible to behold. It seemed impossible for the donkeys to go any further, and the remaining natives refused to proceed, while Mr. Fitzgerald, who had not been in the best of health, was in need of rest and refreshment.

Sleep was almost impossible in the camp that night, owing to the difficulty of

hovered at a distance, as if watching him until he got beyond the range of their domain.

Zurbriggen proceeded on toward the summit, at length reaching the line of eternal snow. Under that snow there was evidence that Aconcagua was, as has long been supposed, an extinct volcano. The depression in the summit indicated that there had been a crater there in ages long gone. The scenes of volcanic agitation and disruption were everywhere covered by the snowy mantle, and Zurbriggen, although an expert climber, was unable to bring scientific study to bear upon the scene before him.

This was the highest point the Alpine guide had ever reached, Aconcagua being 23,910 feet above the sea, and therefore more than 8,000 higher than Mount Blanc. Zurbriggen says that all Chili lay in a panorama before him, and he thought that in the far distance he could almost catch a glimpse of the ocean.

before taking another. For almost two thousand feet down from the summit the descent was almost precipitous, and a single false step would have cost the adventurer his life.

On a crag between the summit and the snow line Zurbriggen saw the remains of a man who had undoubtedly perished in an attempt to reach the mountain top. The Swiss had no time to examine the bones and tattered remnants of clothing, but his opinion was that the remains were those of a native. It is known that several Chileans have tried to scale the mountain, and not all of them have been accounted for.

Zurbriggen says that the climate at the summit is the coldest he ever experienced, and that long delay there would have been sure death for him. He had great difficulty in keeping from being frozen, and was afraid to stand still for any length of time for fear of falling asleep. When he reached

understood, he duly honored by the literary and scientific societies of Santiago and Valparaiso, and it is expected that similar honors will be extended to them in Buenos Ayres and other American cities.

At San Felipe, the chief town of the Province of Aconcagua, the public officials, who at first gave little encouragement to the expedition, gave a public reception to the explorers upon their return, while a multitude of the more ignorant natives assembled to stare in admiration at the man who had climbed to the summit of the mysterious mountain and come back alive.

#### ANTARCTIC RACE OF MEN.

Julius Von Payer, the Famous German Explorer, Going to the South Pole to Look for Them.

I have noticed with interest the announcement of the two American expeditions to the South Pole, and, if they come to some-

ice has never been scientifically examined as to its structure and movement? The result of such examination alone would justify the sending out of a great expedition.

Former explorers in those parts have seen land at widely separated points, others report a continuous barrier of icebergs lying along the coast of an Antarctic continent. These discoveries, or alleged discoveries, must be investigated; they call loudly for corroboration or denial.

I have had wide experience in the exploration of unknown seas and lands and hope that by familiarity with the dangers of this gigantic undertaking I may succeed in pushing it to a quicker issue than others have. My first northern expedition started twenty-seven years ago, when I explored the interior of Greenland and its great mountains. Two years later I was commissioned to ascertain if an open sea existed east of Spitzbergen, between



The Start of the Expedition on the First Day Amid the Tropical Wildness at the Base of the Mountains.